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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2011, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 10:50 a.m.

HISTORIC SPENDING CUTS

The SPEAKER. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. OLSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1473, a continuing resolution which will fund our government and, most importantly, our troops' families for the rest of the fiscal year and will help generate a better environment for job creation.

While this final agreement is far from perfect—more cuts going forward are absolutely needed—this agreement is a victory for the American people. At \$38.5 billion in cuts, H.R. 1473 represents the largest spending cut since World War II. Domestic spending will actually fall by 4 percent this year with the passage of this CR.

We accomplished this historic cut just months after President Obama asked Congress for a spending freeze. That would have meant zero, nada, nil, cuts in spending this year. In fact, our Federal Government will spend \$78.5 billion less than President Obama proposed this year with the passage of H.R. 1473.

These historic cuts would not be possible without the strong and constant

support of the American people to end the out-of-control spending in Washington. Their voices were heard loud and clear on November 2.

House Republicans were able to translate the people's call for reining in spending into the largest non-defense spending cut in history. Washington is no longer talking about if we should cut spending; we are talking about how much we should cut spending. This is the American people's victory, and they deserve the credit for providing the support and momentum to change our debate.

This bill is also a victory for my home State of Texas and for the good people of the 22nd Congressional District, whom I am honored to represent here in Washington. Importantly, H.R. 1473 repeals the Doggett amendment, a heavy-handed regulation that was forcing Texas, and only Texas, to violate its own constitution and spend education funds as the Federal Government dictated while giving every other State in the Nation the flexibility to spend their funds as they see fit.

The Doggett amendment, which was inserted in last summer's State government bailout bill, singled out Texas by attaching unconstitutional strings to \$830 million in funding. No other State faced such treatment.

Teachers across Texas have faced the threat of losing their jobs with this expected shortfall in education money. But passage of this bill will right this egregious wrong for the great State of Texas.

Mr. Speaker, passage of this measure today means we will have succeeded in reducing discretionary spending to pre-bailout stimulus levels. We will be lowering the baseline for next year's budget, which will result in hundreds of billions of dollars in savings over the next decade.

Most importantly, we are setting the stage for the real challenge that comes next: cutting trillions in spending

through the new Republican budget, the Path to Prosperity. We didn't get into this financial crisis overnight, and we are not getting out of it overnight.

But today, for the first time in years, Washington will begin to tighten its belt, just as families across America do every day. This is just the beginning of an important first step forward in changing the culture of spending the people's tax dollars with reckless abandon. America is open for business again.

I urge my colleagues to vote for H.R. 1473.

REPEAL DME COMPETITIVE BIDDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. HARTZLER). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ALTMIRE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALTMIRE. Madam Speaker, 4 years ago I began to express my concerns about the competitive bidding program that CMS proposed for durable medical equipment. The goal of the program was laudable—to save money and to cut waste, fraud, and abuse from the Medicare program—but the implementation of the program has been fraught with problems.

This issue is of particular importance to me because the Pittsburgh region, which I represent, was one of the first nine regions chosen by CMS to implement the competitive bidding demonstration. As I learned more about the design of the program, it became clear that CMS did not foresee the unintended consequences that could result, including the possibility that patients could lose the personal relationship they've developed with their local provider, in turn compromising their quality of care; or the possibility that small suppliers, which make up well over 90 percent of the Nation's medical equipment providers, would not be able to compete in the new market.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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I also realized that western Pennsylvania would be disproportionately impacted by competitive bidding because of our large Medicare population and the growing medical device industry that is key to the success of our region's economy.

After a poor start to the competitive bidding program in 2008, Congress intervened and passed legislation that I helped introduce to direct CMS to delay the program for 18 months. Critical flaws in the initial bidding process produced fewer competitors, fewer home care services, and a substantial decrease in the quality of care offered to seniors and individuals with disabilities. Congress also instructed CMS to redesign the program to avoid these programs when it conducted the re-bid.

Last fall, CMS launched the re-bid and this past January the program went into effect in the nine regions in the country, including western Pennsylvania. In the first few months of implementation, the worst fears expressed by patients, providers, and Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have been realized. It is clear that despite the delay and the direction from Congress, no significant improvements have been made to the program or the bidding process. Providers who have served beneficiaries for years are closing their doors, and patients have been left confused and unsure where to turn for their care.

While CMS hopes the program will ensure beneficiary access to quality medical supplies and services and improve the effectiveness of payments, the results suggest otherwise. So 2 weeks ago, CMS announced it would delay the second round of its competitive bidding program for 6 months, until the summer of 2013. Additionally, the chief Medicare expert at the Congressional Budget Office recently said the CMS competitive bidding process is "seriously flawed."

This is a good sign, but the round two delay does nothing to help the beneficiaries and small businesses that have already been negatively impacted by round one. The program continues to be a bad deal for seniors and small business owners. That's why I joined with my colleague from Pennsylvania, GLENN THOMPSON, to introduce legislation to repeal the DME competitive bidding program. Our bill would fully repeal the program in a budget-neutral manner, not adding one penny to the Federal deficit. To date, we have 75 bipartisan cosponsors and over 30 advocacy groups that have endorsed our legislation.

I cannot support the DME competitive bidding program when it has become evident the program will unravel the DME small business community and compromise quality of care for seniors and others who rely on durable medical equipment devices. I will continue to work with Congressman THOMPSON to advance this legislation, and I would ask my colleagues to join us in this effort to repeal DME competitive bidding.

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SUPPORTING FINANCIAL LITERACY MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize this April as Financial Literacy Month.

Each year my good friend and fellow chair of the House Financial and Economic Literacy Caucus, Mr. HINOJOSA, and I work to bring Financial Literacy Month to Capitol Hill. In that effort we are joined by our longtime Senate allies, Senator AKAKA and Senator ENZI.

Traditionally, we have offered a resolution as a way to showcase the latest trends in financial and economic literacy. This year, however, the House is taking an understandable break from debating commemorative resolutions in order to focus attention on pressing items like the budget.

Nonetheless, I want to take a brief opportunity today to encourage my colleagues to take part in this year's Financial Literacy Month. It's a time when nonprofits, educational institutions, financial organizations, government agencies, and others work together to protect consumers and prepare our children to prosper in today's sophisticated marketplace.

For example, from April 17 through 23, America's credit unions will hold National Credit Union Youth Week, which focuses on teaching young Americans about the benefits of setting goals and saving to reach them. In a parallel effort, the American Bankers Association Education Foundation held Teach Children to Save Day on April 12. It's an annual event during which America's banking professionals have volunteered to teach money skills to 4 million young people.

Madam Speaker, this is a trend we should applaud, one that I encourage my colleagues to participate in by joining the Financial and Economic Literacy Caucus. Members and their staffs can also join us this Friday in the Cannon Caucus Room from noon to 3 for a Financial Literacy Day Fair featuring information and constituent outreach materials from 55 of the Nation's leading financial literacy organizations, including the Jump\$tart Coalition, Junior Achievement, and the Council for Economic Education.

Madam Speaker, too many Americans continue to enter the workforce unprepared to handle money, buy a home, or save for retirement. According to the Jump\$tart Coalition's most recent survey, our high school seniors are now scoring lower on financial literacy than they have during any years since 2000; and yet, according to a 2009 survey from the Council for Economic Education, only 34 States require school districts to include personal finance in their education standards for students K-12.

These are troubling numbers, and that's why we must work together to

give Americans the tools they need to prepare against economic uncertainty, recognize deceptive practices, build credit, and make dozens of other day-to-day financial decisions. These are skills that everyone must learn to prosper in today's complex marketplace, and that's what Financial Literacy Month is all about.

So I encourage my colleagues who are interested in learning more to join us this Friday from noon to 3 in the Cannon Caucus Room for our annual Financial Literacy Day Fair.

PUERTO RICO GAS PIPELINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIERREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk once again about Puerto Rico, but this time it's a little different.

I rise to note that Governor Luis Fortuño of Puerto Rico has actually said something I can agree with. Speaking about a proposed gas pipeline, the Republican Governor of Puerto Rico said, "We cannot continue to depend on fossil fuels. Gasoducto is fossil fuels."

He went on to say, "Tying us down to natural gas for 30 years would be a grave mistake."

He was referring to the construction of a natural gas pipeline on an island where beautiful beaches, mountains, and rain forests are both irreplaceable natural resources and part of the economic engine that drives tourism. A gas pipeline, that sounds like a dubious proposition. And I agree.

Mr. Fortuño spoke those words 2 years ago as a candidate. Sadly, now that he's safely in office, Governor Fortuño has changed his mind. Now he enthusiastically supports not just gas pipelines but a much bigger, environmentally disruptive, and more expensive pipeline.

And how the construction of this gigantic, supersized pipeline is being handled is another reason why I must speak out again on the civil rights crisis in Puerto Rico. The ruling party would rather people not notice that Mr. Fortuño and Governor Fortuño have opposite positions on the same gas pipeline, so they are working hard to move this project forward under the cover of night.

Every day the ruling party answers this question: If you wanted to undertake a potentially dangerous, economically dubious, environmentally disastrous, and extremely unpopular project, how would you go about doing it?

Here's the ruling party's answer: You circumvent feasibility studies. You avoid environmental impact studies. You ignore the standard permitting and licensing procedures. And you take every step possible to eliminate public hearings and public scrutiny.

But how do you proceed without these necessary safeguards and information? Well, if you're the government